

Chicopee Register

COMMUNITY

A celebration of life on Organ Donation Day

By Dalton Zbierski
Staff Writer

CHICOPEE – An emotional May 13 celebration at Market Square in Chicopee Center left a handful of residents in tears. Chicopee celebrated Organ Donation Day, as multiple organ transplant recipients described the series of events that brought them new life.

“My new birthday is March 31, the day of the transplant. I am forever grateful for my donor, my living angel, and our transplant teams. I am living proof that your kindness can change a life. I am forever grateful for this new lease on life,” said Kathy Balakier, who received a new liver on March 31.

Balakier was one of several organ recipients connected to Chicopee, who spoke last Thursday.

Glenn Wiley received a transplant in November 2015. Suffering from liver cancer, a disease that he was told is 100



PHOTO SUBMITTED BY BOBBI MABB, MAYOR JOHN VIEAU'S COMMUNICATIONS AND SPECIAL PROJECTS MANAGER

[L to R] City Treasurer Marie Laflamme, Meghan Balakier, Mayor John Vieau, organ transplant recipient Kathy Balakier and Ward 4 City Councilor George Balakier pose on Organ Donation Day in Chicopee.

See **CELEBRATION** page 7

COMMUNITY

Family at center of St. Stan's takeout barbeque



TURLEY PUBLICATIONS STAFF PHOTO SUBMITTED BY DALTON ZBIERSKI

[L to R] Aiden Grandmont-Bodine, a sixth-grader, stands beside Pre-K teacher Joanna Powers at a drive-through meal distribution that occurred at St. Stanislaus School on May 16.

By Dalton Zbierski
Staff Writer

CHICOPEE – Family was at the heart of the “Family Chicken Barbeque Takeout,” a drive-through meal distribution that occurred at St. Stanislaus School on May 16.

Approximately 350 meals were served to community members, helping to fund the Catholic school on Front Street, which educates students from Pre-K through eighth-grade.

The weather was beautiful last Sunday, as dozens of vehicles systematically pulled behind the school to retrieve their meals. Inside the building, school staff, par-

ents, students and supporters prepared the meals.

“This how it works; this is what keeps us going,” said Maria Cataldo, mother of a sixth-grade student. “This is a family, and everybody pitches in. It’s not just a school or just teachers and students and parents and administration. This is a family. The more things that we are able to do as a group, the closer people become.”

Eighth-grade student Savanah Soja has volunteered at numerous drive-through functions that the school has facilitated during the COVID-19 pandemic. She said that typical fundraising activities, such as bingo, ar-

en’t currently plausible, but alternative events are.

“These help with funding the school. I like to help out if they need volunteers,” said Soja. “It’s really nice because I know last year, when nothing was going on, it was really devastating not being able to see people. Even just being able to see them for a second makes me really happy.”

Sister Cecilia Haier helped organize the May 16 initiative. She said that raising money at the current time is critical, as the school must cover COVID-19-related sanitation expenses in addition to purchasing technology and

See **ST. STAN'S** page 8

COMMUNITY

Chicopee gains ground on COVID-19

By Dalton Zbierski
Staff Writer

CHICOPEE – The city of Chicopee is gaining ground on COVID-19. During a briefing on May 18, Mayor John Vieau shared exciting news; the statistics are taking a turn for the better.

“I can tell you that the numbers are finally trending in the right direction. The city of Chicopee, metrics wise, has been in the ‘red’ for a very long time. As of last Thursday, we are in the ‘yellow,’” said Vieau.

In the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, municipalities are assigned colors based off the percentage of positive COVID-19 tests per every 100,000 residents. The color red is used to highlight high-risk communities, in which five or more percent of residents, who are tested for COVID-19, test positive.

Chicopee’s positive test rate has fallen below five percent for the first time in recent memory, as the city transitions into the ‘yellow’ category.

On Tuesday morning, Health Director Lisa Sanders informed Vieau that there were only three new COVID-19 cases reported in the city on Monday.

Only nine new cases of

See **COVID** page 8



COMMUNITY

Picture perfect

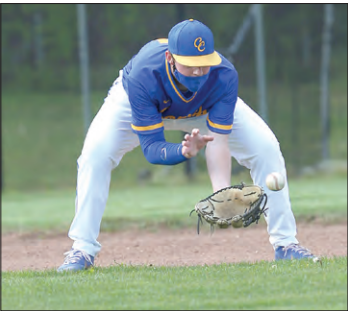
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COMMUNITY

Community gardens

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SPORTS

Colts fall to Brownies

See Page 9



EDUCATION

Elms College graduates 471

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Picture perfect; Shea captures her moment

By Dalton Zbierski
Staff Writer

CHICOPEE, SPRINGFIELD – In pursuit of her dream, a career in sports photography, a Chicopee resident is going above and beyond. Kelly Shea has earned statewide recognition for her excellence behind the camera.

Shea, a graduate of American International College's Class of 2021, received first place honors in the sports category of the 2020 College Pictures of the Year photography contest, sponsored by the Boston Press Photographers Association.

The winning photo was taken from high above the ice in the XL Center in Hartford, CT, as the Hartford Wolf Pack battled the Providence Bruins, a contest between American Hockey League rivals.

Shea positioned herself above the XL Center's massive scoreboard to take the award-winning shot, a nerve-racking experience that has become routine.

"It definitely is a little heart-wrenching going up there," said Shea. "It's exactly what you'd expect; these big metal catwalks that you kind of walk through, and then when you shoot, you actually have to lean over the edge and shoot straight down. You're essentially looking straight down on the ice. It's definitely a little scary, being up there."

Shea refuses to let the nerves affect her. While photographing play below, she is careful not to change batteries, touch her SD card or take her phone out. There is no room for error.

"It's one of those things where you have to pay so much more attention to what you're doing because one misstep; that can be a real issue," said Shea.

Growing up in Ware, Shea was surrounded by hockey enthusiasts; her father and grandfather both once played.

Shea went to AIC to study graphic design. Taking a freshman year photog-



KELLY SHEA PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY KELLY SHEA

Chicopee-based photographer Kelly Shea earned first place in the sports category of the 2020 College Pictures of the Year photography contest for this image that she captured in the XL Center in Hartford, CT, as the Hartford Wolf Pack battled the Providence Bruins.

raphy course set her on a different course.

Shea began photographing the hockey team at AIC before venturing into other sports on campus.

Her passion for hockey and skill behind the camera enabled her to work for the Springfield Pics, a junior ice hockey organization, and the Springfield Thunderbirds, the AHL affiliate of the National Hockey League's Florida Panthers, before making her way to Hartford.

"A lot of sports photography is being proactive and reading the situation," said Shea. "A lot of it is seeing what's going on and understanding what the players are doing. You have to analyze everything and make your decisions from there."

When working an AHL game, Shea jokes that her downtime occurs while she's taking pictures. Between periods, she must filter through photos and make them available to social media teams on both sides of the ice.

"I'll take 1,200 to 1,500 photos a game, and we'll have 15-minute intermissions," said Shea. "In my camera, I can mark photos that I like. It's called starring the photos. When I import the photos, I'll only import the photos that have stars on them. If I'm shooting and get a really good photo, I'll do that so that when I go to edit, I can immediately get that one done and up."

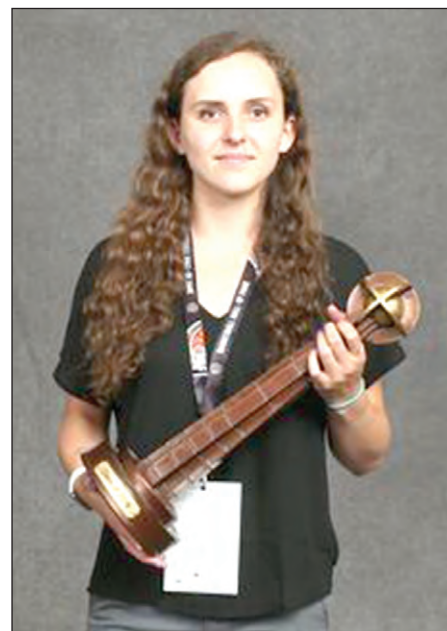
Shea said that it pays dividends to be familiar with the sport you're shooting. For instance, on a breakaway, as two players skate down the ice, Shea will focus on the one without the puck, knowing that player will likely be the recipient of pass.

It is Shea's career ambition to work full-time in the NHL, and she'll always look back fondly on her four years at AIC, where she cultivated skills in photography, videography, newspaper writing, broadcasting and marketing.

Shea thanked the AIC athletic department for giving her an opportunity as a freshman and credited a professor, who offered wisdom she won't forget.

"Some of the best advice I ever got was from a professor, who told me, 'Bring your camera literally everywhere you go. You're going out to coffee? Bring your camera. You're going to the park to visit friends? Bring your camera,'" said Shea. "To be honest with you, I thought it was a little bit ridiculous when I first got the advice, but that's honestly the best advice I've ever gotten because the only way to get better as a photographer is to practice."

Kelly Shea got her first opportunity as a sports photographer shooting the hockey team at AIC. Here is an image taken by Shea, portraying a locker room celebration.



AIC graduate Kelly Shea of Chicopee has earned recognition statewide for her prowess in sports journalism.



Photographer Kelly Shea has been employed by the Springfield Thunderbirds. Here is a photo she captured of a Thunderbirds goalie.



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Sunshine added to Chicopee Community Gardens

By Dalton Zbierski
Staff Writer

CHICOPEE – Individuals from Sunshine Village recently teamed up with the Chicopee Community Gardens, crafting signs to be placed outside of the gardens at Lincoln Grove Park on Broadway Street and Rivers Park on Chicopee Street.

Sunshine Villages offers a range of day programs, services and employment to hundreds of individuals with developmental disabilities at its Chicopee, Agawam and Three Rivers campuses. Approximately six members of the Sunshine Village community created the signs that were gifted to the Chicopee Community Gardens.

“The individuals and I have put this together; they stained it, helped do the graphics and helped put the paint on. At first, we had it just black, and then some other people said it would be nice with some color so we went back and added the color, and, with each change, it came more and more to life,” said Emily Pennell, a Program Supervisor at Sunshine Village.

Pennell said that the individuals, who produced the signs, were thrilled with how they came out. She voiced admiration for their creativity, as did Sunshine Village Case Manager Brandy Baker.

“I’m very impressed. Seeing everyone come together was really nice to watch. It’s great to be able to design this piece to give back to the community,” said Baker, as she presented a sign to the Lin-



TURLEY PUBLICATIONS STAFF PHOTOS BY DALTON ZBIERSKI

[L to R] Brandee Baker, Emily Pennell and Maryanne Blinn stand next to a sign that individuals from Sunshine Village gifted to the Chicopee Community Gardens.

coln Grove Park garden on May 14.

Baker noted that, when pandemic restrictions are lifted, individuals from Sunshine Village will enjoy visiting the community gardens, bringing family members to showcase their work.

“Them being able to create this sign and, then, coming to look at it is a real-

ly nice benefit for them, and, sometimes, they even bring their families to show the stuff that they make here, which is really nice,” said Baker.

Maryanne Blinn has been involved with the Chicopee Community Gardens for years. She was on-hand last Friday, as Pennell and Baker delivered the sign to the garden on Broadway Street.

“We’ve had the connection with Sunshine Village pretty much since the beginning,” said Blinn. “They’ve been great. We reached out, and they volunteered their time and resources to put the sign together for us.”

Blinn thanked committee member Kim Morrisette for connecting the Chi-

copee Community Gardens with Sunshine Village. The ingenuity displayed by the Sunshine Village community never ceases to amaze her.

“It’s fantastic,” said Blinn. “The energy that they bring to us and the creativity; being able to bring this sign and really showcase this garden because without this sign I feel like you don’t even know it’s here.”

As part of a grant received by the Chicopee Parks & Recreation Department, a 20-bed garden is being added to Rivers Park and will open in the coming months. There, it is expected that individuals from Sunshine Village will continue to make a positive impact on the city of Chicopee.



Individuals from Sunshine Village helped craft this sign that now appears at the Chicopee Community Garden on Broadway Street.

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**BELCHERTOWN
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2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR**

The Belchertown Public School District is now accepting applications for the following School Choice openings for the 2021-2022 school year:

Grade K	8	Grade 6	1
Grade 2	4	Grade 7	10
Grade 3	4	Grade 8	10
Grade 4	1	Grade 9	12
Grade 5	4	Grade 10	12

The Belchertown Public Schools combine innovation and tradition to provide positive educational experiences for all of our students through quality programs, dynamic teaching and healthy relationships.

The deadline for submitting a **complete** application packet which includes all required documents is 4:00 p.m. on **Friday, June 25, 2021.**

The selection of non-resident students for admission will be in the form of a random drawing when the number of requests exceeds the number of available spaces. There will be two drawings for this purpose. The first will take place on June 25, 2021, and in the event of unexpected additional openings, a second drawing will be conducted on August 13, 2021.

The application and guidelines can be downloaded at **www.belchertownps.org** or picked up at 14 Maple St., Belchertown, MA 01007.

The Belchertown School District does not discriminate in the admission of any child on the basis of age, sex, gender identity, race, religion, color, national origin, sexual orientation or ancestry, athletic performance, physical handicap, special need, academic performance, disability or proficiency in the English language in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.

COVID Restrictions to be lifted May 29

BOSTON – On May 17, the Baker-Polito Administration announced that the Commonwealth is on track to meet the goal of vaccinating 4.1 million residents by the first week of June and all remaining COVID-19 restrictions will be lifted effective May 29.

The Commonwealth’s face covering order will also be rescinded on May 29. The Department of Public Health will issue a new face covering advisory consistent with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s updated guidance. Face coverings will still be mandatory for all individuals on public and private transportation systems (including rideshares, livery, taxi, ferries, MBTA, Commuter Rail and transportation stations), in healthcare facilities and in other settings hosting vulnerable populations, such as congregate care settings.

Governor Charlie Baker will end the

State of Emergency June 15.

The Administration also announced updates that will be effective May 18 to revise face covering requirements for youth and amateur sports and other guidance relating to childcare programs and K-12 schools. The Administration will release updated guidance for summer camps effective May 29.

The Administration is able to take these steps to reopen the Commonwealth’s economy because Massachusetts is on track to meet the goal set in December to fully vaccinate over 4 million individuals by the first week of June. The Commonwealth leads the nation in vaccinating residents, with 75 percent of adults receiving at least one dose. To date, over 4 million residents have received a first dose, with 3.2 million fully vaccinated.

New cases have dropped by 89 percent since January 8. COVID hospitaliza-

tions are down 88 percent since January 1 and the positive test rate is down by 88percent from peaking at 8.7 percent on January 1 to 1percent today.

Effective May 29

Effective May 29, all industries will be permitted to open. With the exception of remaining face-covering requirements for public and private transportation systems and facilities housing vulnerable populations, all industry restrictions will be lifted, and capacity will increase to 100percent for all industries. The gathering limit will be rescinded.

All industries will be encouraged to follow CDC guidance for cleaning and hygiene protocols.

On May 18, 2020, the Administration published the reopening phases, which called for ending restrictions when vaccines became widely available. Today, there are over 975 locations for Massachusetts residents to access vaccines without delay.

Face Covering Guidance

In line with updated CDC face covering guidance, the Administration will rescind the current face covering order and issue a new face covering advisory effective May 29.

Non-vaccinated individuals are advised to continue wearing face masks and to continue distancing in most settings. The advisory will also recommend fully vaccinated individuals no longer need to wear a face covering or social distance indoors or outdoors except for in certain situations.

Face coverings will still be required for all individuals on public and private transportation (including rideshares, liv-

ery, taxi, ferries, MBTA, Commuter Rail and transportation stations), healthcare facilities and providers, congregate care settings and health and rehabilitative day services.

Face coverings will also remain required indoors for staff and students of K-12 schools and early education providers.

Youth and Amateur Sports Face Covering Guidance

Effective May 18, the youth and amateur sports guidance will be updated to no longer require face coverings for youth athletes 18 and under while playing outdoor sports. Effective May 29, all youth and amateur sports restrictions will be lifted.

K-12, Early Education and Summer Camp Guidance

Effective May 18, guidance from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Department of Early Education and Care will be updated to no longer require masks for outdoor activities like recess and to allow for the sharing of objects in classrooms, in both K-12 and childcare settings. This guidance will remain in effect beyond May 29.

The Administration will release updated guidance for summer camps, effective May 29, which will include no longer requiring masks for outdoor activities.

State of Emergency Order

Governor Baker will end the State of Emergency June 15, and the Administration will work with legislative and municipal partners during this period in order to manage an orderly transition from emergency measures adopted by executive order and special legislation during the period of the State of Emergency.

Girl Scouts schedule free ‘Intro to Outdoor Skills’ event at Moose Lodge

CHICOPEE – Next Saturday, Girl Scouts of Central & Western Massachusetts will offer a free “Intro to Outdoors Skills” program for Chicopee girls currently in Kindergarten, first-grade or second-grade, who are not yet Girl Scout members. The event will occur on Sat., May 22, from 11 a.m. until noon at the Chicopee Moose Lodge, located in Chicopee at 244 Fuller Rd.

Girls will earn their first Girl Scout

patch while learning basic hiking and trail safety skills. A guardian will be permitted to attend with each attendee.

Space is limited. All COVID safety precautions will be followed. This is an outdoor event, dress accordingly. RSVP and register at <https://bit.ly/GSoutdoorskills>.

For more information contact GSCWM Recruitment Manager Tammy Gilpatrick at tgilpatrick@gscwm.org or 508-749-3639.

1	2	3	4		5	6	7		8	9	10
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59					60			61			
62					63				64		

CLUES ACROSS

1. Prevents harm to young

5. “Losing My Religion” rockers

8. Partner to pan

11. Cavalry unit

13. Peyton’s little brother

14. Mexican dish

15. Disseminates info to the public

16. Set an animal on

17. Canadian flyers

18. Elongated mouths of anthropods

20. I (German)

21. Opposite of west

22. Glows

25. Measures how quickly a car moves

30. One who has gained wealth

31. Patti Hearst’s captors

32. Extensive landed

property

33. Male aristocrat

38. For each

41. More fidgety

43. Very happy

45. A place to store info

47. Helps to heal

49. 12th month (abbr.)

50. Broad, shallow craters

55. Nocturnal S. American rodent

56. Frost

57. Ethiopian town

59. Curved shapes

60. Company that rings receipts

61. Spiritual leader

62. Sheep native to Sweden

63. Cars need it

64. Partner to relaxation

lution tool (abbr.)

2. Type of school

3. Formal close (music)

4. Transmits high voltage

5. A way to occupy a certain area

6. Draws out

7. His Airness

8. Nocturnal rodents

9. South American plants

10. Homestead

12. Bland or semiliquid food

14. Forest resident

19. The body needs it

23. Atomic mass unit (abbr.)

24. Spell

25. Relaxing place

26. Political fundraising tool

27. Make a mistake

28. Partner to Adam

29. Tyrant

34. Unit of electrical resistance

35. A history of one’s life

36. Actor DiCaprio

37. Sea eagle

39. Avoiding being caught

40. ___ de Mornay, actress

41. Belonging to a thing

42. Not us

44. Motorcars

45. Capital of Bangladesh

46. Ancient Greek sophist

47. Practice boxing

48. ___ Grant, actor

51. Swiss river

52. S. Sudan river

53. A bumpkin

54. One point south of southwest

58. Small island (British)

CROSSWORD SOLUTION ON PAGE 11

Flagging of Veterans Graves in Chicopee



PHOTO SUBMITTED BY JESUS M. PEREIRA

CHICOPEE – Please join us in a time-honored tradition in paying respect to those who have served. Please wear masks.

Calvary/Elmwood 2140 Northamp-

ton Street May 24th, 3-5p.m. [Rain Date May 25th Forestdale 304 Cabot Street May 28th, 4p.m.]

St. Jerome 125 St Jerome Ave May 22nd, 10 a.m.

Parks & Rec to host multiple classes

CHICOPEE – The Chicopee Parks & Recreation Department will offer residents multiple classes next month.

First Aid program

A certification class in First Aid/cardiopulmonary resuscitation and the use of an automated external defibrillator will occur on Sat., June 5, from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the Chicopee Parks & Recreation Department at 687 Front St.

The cost for the full class is \$75 for residents and \$80 for non-residents. These are basic certifications and do not apply for daycare providers, lifeguards and nurses. Participants are invited to bring a snack.

Class space is limited! To register go to www.chicopeerec.com Deadline to sign up is Wednesday June 2.

Yoga in the Park Classes

The Parks & Recreation Department

will also make yoga classes available on Tuesdays from 6-7 p.m. and on Saturday mornings from 10:15-11:15 a.m. The slate of Tuesday classes will run from June 1 until June 29, while the Saturday classes will begin on June 5 and end on July 10; there will be no class on June 18.

The classes are designed to teach calming techniques, including breathing, gentle flowing movements and basic balancing postures that work for all skill levels. Masks must be worn entering and exiting the program but not during the class.

Please bring your own yoga matt and any props you wish to use, as they cannot be provided under current COVID-19 regulations.

The cost for either yoga session is \$65/Residents \$75/Non-Residents. Class space is limited so register now! To register go to www.chicopeerec.com.

County retirement board still taking fire

By Dalton Zbierski
Staff Writer

HAMPDEN – The Hampden County Regional Board of Retirement continues to take heavy fire for its mismanagement of funds, and the town of Hampden is leading the charge to have Chairman Richard Theroux removed.

An audit released in February by the Massachusetts Public Employee Retirement Administration Commission revealed that the retirement board surpassed its budget and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on inappropriate raises, false invoices, travel fees, fraudulent social security and other expenditures between 2014 and 2018.

“It’s not just that this is bad policy. The things that were going on there were both illegal, and some were just plain unethical,” said Hampden Town Administrator Bob Markel.

In April, Laurel Placzek resigned from her role as the Advisory Council member of the retirement board and as the chairperson of the Advisory Council.

Despite initially stating his intent to resign, Theroux has reversed course, much to the chagrin of those in favor of his removal.

“[Theroux] wants to oversee the improvements. Well, I’m not sure that we have a lot of confidence in someone, who is responsible for the problems, overseeing the reforms. Our position in Hampden is that he needs to resign,”

said Markel, who echoed the sentiment of Hampden Board of Selectmen Chair Donald Davenport.

The PERAC audit is troubling to many. Over the course of the audit, \$234,000 was spent on 119 invoices for services that were never reviewed or documented.

Shortly after the release of the audit, Theroux attributed the anomaly to a website malfunction, an excuse that Markel isn’t buying.

“There are all these payments that weren’t backed by contracts,” said Markel. “It’s very, very unusual and, certainly, not in accordance with proper procedure to be making payments to entities of some kind without having a written contract and adequate records of where this money went and to whom it went.”

Furthermore, the retirement board violated procedure by making two attorneys members of its system, paying them a total of \$179,266 in legal fees and \$448,210 in premiums, while the audit was being conducted.

The audit also reported that multiple board members collected thousands of dollars in Social Security, which public employees are ineligible for.

“Everybody knows that Massachusetts is not a Social Security state,” said Markel. “If you work in the public sector, there’s no Social Security that you pay. You are, instead, in the state retirement system, which is a substitute for social security. Three members of the

board put themselves on Social Security; it’s illegal so we may very well see some action in Boston about these kinds of issues that might force [Theroux] out of office.”

The audit also revealed that Theroux submitted \$1,825 in receipts and was reimbursed for rentals on Hyannis Point Road in Mashpee between 2014 and 2017. Since 1998, Theroux has owned a condominium at 11 Hyannis Point Rd.

Furthermore, Theroux was given a raise without approval or documentation.

The audit reported that documents, containing overtime payment information, only listed staff names and salaries with no indication of hours worked or hourly wages.

Markel discussed another red flag that the PERAC audit exposed.

“We all know that the rule in Massachusetts is that you cannot accept more than \$50 in gratuities. The board accepted around \$11,000 in gratuities; that’s illegal. It’s that simple,” said Markel, who added that public employees are required to pass a test from the State Ethics Commission on a yearly basis.

If Theroux is not removed from office, his current term will end in December.

Markel relayed that PERAC representatives are meeting with Theroux on a weekly basis, as PERAC oversees the implementation of reforms. Hampden will not rest until Theroux is removed

from his position.

“[Theroux] seems to think that this is all going to blow over and that all he has to do is tough it out. I don’t think it is, but we’ll see. We are looking for any and all opportunities to exert pressure,” said Markel.

The town of Hampden is relaying the message to its employees and taxpayers that they too have a big stake in how the situation unfolds.

“Because the system has not been well managed over the years, we are now being forced to do catchup contributions. It’s very significant. This small town of 5,100 had an increase in its retirement assessment of \$103,000 this year,” said Markel.

Currently, Hampden is working alongside the town of Longmeadow to seek answers. Both communities will continue advocating for Theroux’s resignation or removal.

“Our feeling is that the Chair should resign, [the retirement board] should wait 30 days and let PERAC, the state regulatory agency, make the appointment. I would have a lot more confidence that PERAC would appoint the right person to oversee the changes that are necessary. If [Theroux] refuses to resign, he can run out his term and the people who want to see reform could provide an alternative candidate for the election.”

Dalton Zbierski is an Editor, who can be reached at dzbierski@turley.com.

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Chicopee Register

May 21, 2021 | Page 5

GUEST COLUMN

Wagner advocates for new Soldiers Home

By State Rep. Joseph Wagner

Following the tragedy and deaths at the Holyoke Soldiers’ Home in the spring of last year, relating to the COVID-19 virus, I stood with a number of my colleagues in June of 2020 at Monument Plaza in Chicopee. It was there I stated the soldiers’ home in Holyoke would be my number one legislative priority, and that our collective voices in western Massachusetts would be heard, so that a tragedy such as the one that occurred would never happen again. In the months that followed, I worked in partnership with my colleagues, including Speaker Mariano, as well as Governor Baker, Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders and members of the veterans community to advance a plan to construct a new soldiers’ home in Holyoke. I was honored to serve as the lead negotiator in the House to reconcile differences between the House and Senate bills to provide funding for a new soldiers’ home. The filing of a conference committee report today achieves that goal and represents a milestone on a continuum of working to improve the lives of veterans in Massachusetts. All Massachusetts veterans who have served and sacrificed on behalf of our nation, particularly the veterans and families touched by the tragedy at the Holyoke Soldiers’ Home, are deserving of our service on their behalf. It is an honor to be a part of the effort to deliver a newly-constructed soldiers’ home in Holyoke so that veterans who reside there are afforded the best possible care and services. I anticipate that the House and Senate will enact this funding authorization next week, and that it will be sent to the Governor for his consideration and signature.

GUEST COLUMN

Rumors of Cryptocurrency’s Death Are Exaggerated

by Thomas L. Knapp,

Director of the William Lloyd Garrison Center for Libertarian Advocacy Journalism

Elon Musk is a man of many skills. He didn’t just make electric cars sexy, he sent one to space. Perhaps chief among his talents is the ability to roil markets by running his mouth. Lately, he’s aimed that talent at cryptocurrency. In February, one of Musk’s companies, Tesla, announced that it had purchased \$1.5 billion worth of Bitcoin; in March, that it would accept Bitcoin for purchases of its cars. Then, in Mid-May, Musk announced that Tesla was suspending vehicle purchases in Bitcoin over “increasing use of fossil fuels for Bitcoin mining and transactions” (while mentioning that “we are also looking at other cryptocurrencies that use less than one percent of Bitcoin’s energy/transaction”. Naturally, the price of Bitcoin in dollars crashed -- back to the terrible old level of February, only twice what it was worth in December. And, naturally, the cryptocurrency naysayer chorus emerged from its groundhog hole to yell “told ya so.” Just like they’ve been doing every other week since May 22, 2010, when Laszlo Hanyecz paid 10,000 Bitcoins (current value, nearly

See **KNAPP** page 12

GUEST COLUMN

Dangers of driving with a dog on your lap

Submitted by TripsWithPets

While driving under the influence was once the major focus of safety on the road, distracted driving of all kinds has gained national attention in recent years. Texting while driving has proven to be the latest serious road hazard; it has cost a number of lives, and most states have developed laws and campaigns against it.

Now, many states are focusing their attention on a new threat – one that has gone under the radar thus far but may prove to be as dangerous as texting and driving. This one involves the widely practiced habit of choosing to drive with a dog sitting on your lap.

The Issues

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety notes that taking your eyes off the road for just two seconds doubles your chance of a crash. That two seconds is all it could take for a frightened or excited pet to jump up on you, claw you, climb up onto the dashboard, or worse – crawl under the brake pedal.

The Facts

A survey AAA and Kurgo revealed that nearly 60 percent of respondents had driven with their pets in the last month, and 31 percent admitted to being distracted by their pet while driving. Distractions included everything from feeding and petting their pets, to taking their photos while driving.

Seventeen percent of respondents who

drove with their pet – nearly one in five – admitted to either allowing their pet to sit on their lap, or holding their pet while driving. Twenty-three percent admitted to using their hands or arms to secure their pet when they hit the brakes.

The Dangers

Beyond potentially causing accidents, there are very real dangers to allowing a pet to sit on your lap. If a crash did occur, a small pet could easily be crushed by a deployed airbag, or thrown from the car and injured or even killed. In addition, an unrestrained dog can act as a missile during a crash. AAA notes that an unrestrained 10-pound dog, where the vehicle is only traveling at 30 mph, will exert roughly 300 pounds of pressure in a crash! So, imagine the devastation that can cause to your pet and anyone in his path.

The Solutions

States are taking notice of the potential dangers. Even in places where there is no specific law pertaining to driving with a pet on your lap, you can still be cited for doing so under broader distracted driving laws. There are pet restraint options in many types, sizes, and price ranges that are comfortable for dogs and still allow them some freedom of movement.

TripsWithPets has been helping pet parents find and book pet-friendly accommodations since 2003.



Petition demands removal of Moriarty

LAWRENCE - Communities of color are fed up with the state’s overbearing control and lack of results through years of state takeovers. Recently, the egregious comments made by DESE board member Michael Moriarty laid bare the state’s view -- “We know they can’t change themselves because they never do.”

A petition started by Massachusetts Jobs with Justice has already garnered 250 signatures that demand the resignation of Moriarty (https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/tba). Speaking on the need for accountability in Lawrence, Holyoke and other communities with underperforming schools, Moriarty’s comments are proof of why a select few school districts remain under state control for years -- nearly a decade in the case of Lawrence. Years of this condescending and racist belief and state interference has stripped all local control from schools with turnaround plans and assigned receivers in charge. Yet, no one holds the state accountable when nothing changes.

The belief that people “can’t change themselves” is apparently driving this lack of democracy and local control. It is a thin-

ly-veiled excuse to ramp up testing, consultants, and experimental programming that lines the pockets of outsiders while leaving students as test subjects who have not seen real improvements in either their services or supports.

Moriarty’s racist rhetoric is not an accurate reflection of our communities. Signers of the aforementioned petition to remove him from DESE believe that his continued appointment will only serve to perpetuate systemic racism and support policies that disproportionately impact BIPOC communities through racist systems of “accountability”. City leaders and parents are calling the state on its systemic racism, and demanding the return of control of local schools to their school committees, parents, and teachers.

Citizens for Public Schools statement: “Outcry over DESE member’s remarks highlights state education policy’s systematic racism, need for change.”

The uproar over a state official’s remark last week about Lawrence and Holyoke shines a light on the systemic racism that

See **PETITION** page 12

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The *Chicopee Register* welcomes submissions of news in or related to Chicopee and its residents. Our "People News," is filled with submitted engagement announcements, wedding announcements, birth announcements, your new baby or news about your 25th or 50th anniversary celebrations. Please e-mail correspondence along with a photo to chicopeeregister@turley.com or send it to: Chicopee Register, c/o Turley Publications, 24 Water Street, Palmer, MA 01069.

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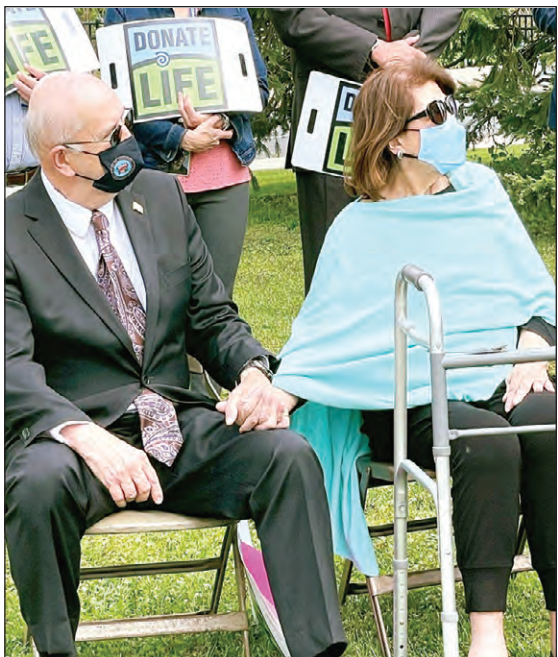
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[L to R] Ward 4 City Councilor George Balakier sits beside his wife Kathy, who received a new liver on March 31.



ORGAN PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY BOBBI MABB, MAYOR JOHN VIEAU'S COMMUNICATIONS AND SPECIAL PROJECTS MANAGER
Scott Meyer of Holyoke, a kidney transplant recipient, speaks during a gathering on May 13.



Mayor John Vieau got emotional, as he spoke on Organ Donation Day in Chicopee last Thursday.



Ward 4 City Councilor George Balakier was personally touched by an organ donor when his wife Kathy received a new liver on March 31.

CELEBRATION from page 1

percent fatal, Wiley didn't expect to see his son graduate from high school. Last week, Wiley's son graduated from college, and he was there to witness the moment. Wiley encouraged residents to take a simple action that could, one day, save a stranger's life. "I'd like to remind everyone on the importance of signing up to be an organ donor. It's very unlikely that you will become an organ donor. It's usually a very tragic event when someone becomes an organ donor, but the lives you can save [are significant]," said Wiley. Matt Boger, of New England Donor Services, emphatically led the ceremony.

Boger stated that residents of all ages can become a donor; recently, a 94-year-old became a donor. "There's no need to go to the movies; these are real life stories of people who have been personally touched," said Boger. Currently, there are more than 108,000 Americans waiting for a life-saving organ transplant; over 6,000 reside in New England alone, said Boger. "Organ donation is very rare. It does not happen often," said Boger. "In fact, you're more likely to need a transplant than to become an organ donor, but those individuals are appreciated and thanked because of that wonderful gift." More than 98 percent of Massachu-


setts donors sign up through the Registry of Motor Vehicles, and an RMV employee spoke at the May 13 gathering. Mayor John Vieau was also on-hand. "This is a celebration of life. It touches me, and I get a little emotional thinking about it. The world is a much better place with all of you in it," said Vieau, in the direction of the transplant recipients. "Without your health and well-being, what else do you really have? To have a second chance at life because someone donated an organ or a tissue is surreal." Balakier's journey has been well-documented throughout Chicopee over the past six months. Balakier was diagnosed with liver disease five years ago but required a living donor with Type O blood,

who was in between the ages of 18 and 60 and in good health. "I learned that the liver is the only organ that regenerates itself. A living donor gives about half of their liver to a recipient, and in about six weeks, both livers grow back to full size. How amazing is that," said Balakier. After months of searching, Balakier found a donor on March 16. Her operation occurred on March 31, a day that she considers as her new birthday. After five weeks of healing in the hospital and at a rehabilitation facility, Balakier returned home two weeks ago. Each day, she's growing stronger and healthier, as she enjoys the loving presence of her daughter and husband.

Photo from Spring 2019

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TURLEY PUBLICATIONS STAFF PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY DALTON ZBIERSKI
[L to R] Sophie and Sophie Grandmont-Bo-dine, Joanne Powers and Lisa Ball volunteered at a drive-through meals initiative at St. Stanislaus School on May 16.

ST STAN'S from page 1

other resources that are essential to each classroom.

The day took on special meaning for Haier, who was able to see family members for the first time since the pandemic took full effect in Massachusetts last March.

"Actually, my family drove down from Eden, NY to do the chickens. They do this there for their church and fire company so they came down to help us raise some money here today. It's been a pleasure to be with family for the first time in a year-and-a-half and to help the school community," said Haier.

Haier was especially impressed by students and alumni, who made their way to the school on a Sunday, contributing to the sense of community that defined the event.

"They're here to help," said Haier. "It's great to see [alumni] and find out what they're doing in high school. It's a positive experience for us when we have them come back and share with us what they're doing."

St. Stanislaus School has been existent in Chicopee for over 123 years.

The school was founded as a parish school for the children of Polish immigrants and has been under the administration of the Conventual Franciscans of Our Lady of



[L to R] Allison Kehoe, Emma Corridan, Liz Moran and Sara Wolowicz greet drivers at the "Family Chicken Barbeque Takeout" that occurred outside of St. Stanislaus School last Sunday.

the Angels Province and the Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph of Hamburg, NY since 1907.

Over the course of more than a century, three different school buildings have held the title of "St. Stanislaus School."

A fire in 1973 destroyed a brick school that was constructed in 1925. The current school was built on the same site.

Approximately 350 meals were distributed at the "Family Chicken Barbeque Takeout" initiative at St. Stanislaus School on May 16.



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COVID from page 1

COVID-19 were reported last weekend. On May 19, there were only 95 active COVID-19 cases in the city.

"We haven't heard a number like that in a very long time," said Vieau, in reference to the total of 79 active cases that were existent on May 18.

Since the onset of the pandemic, the city has reported a total of 4,417 cases of the novel coronavirus; 4,176 have recovered, and 26 others perished.

Due to decreasing case counts, Chicopee's COVID-19 municipal testing site at the upper level of the RiverMills Senior Center at 5 W Main St. will only be open one day each week from 8 a.m. until noon, although the specific week day has not yet been determined.

On May 17, Gov. Charlie Baker surprised many when he announced that the state's face covering mandate would be rescinded on May 29, following guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Chicopee will follow guidance from the state, the CDC and the Department of Public Health.

In City Hall, the decree from the

Governor's Office was unexpected to say the least.

"Things came very fast; I'll call it sprinting. I'll be blunt with everyone; I don't think anyone expected it," said Vieau. "We all expected a very gradual approach into August, and now everything's been shifted back to put the onus, I'll say, on the individual that vaccines are there; take advantage of it."

As the Commonwealth has pledged to vaccinate 4.1 million residents by the end of the first week of June, the city of Chicopee will continue to encourage individuals to get inoculated. Vieau explained that there are many advantages to being fully vaccinated.

"Fully vaccinated people can, obviously, do things that people who chose not to get the vaccine [cannot]," said Vieau. "If you are fully vaccinated, and I'll use the words of the CDC, it is unlikely that you will contract or transmit COVID-19."

Advisories have been given for individuals, who aren't vaccinated, to follow.

"For people, who chose not to be vaccinated, it's recommended that you wear a mask if you go into a barber shop, if you attend a gathering,

go to a movie, attend a full capacity worship, go to church, participate in an indoor chorus or participate in indoor high intensity exercise," said Vieau.

All restrictions will be lifted on outdoor youth and amateur sports on May 29. Indoor athletes will still be required to wear masks, as will visitors, officials and coaches, but capacity restrictions will be removed.

"We're looking at outdoor activities and congregating again like we haven't done in a very long time," said Vieau.

This summer, National Night Out, an event designed to strengthen the relationship between residents and members of law enforcement, will return to the city. No determination has been made on events such as the Downtown GetDown and fireworks display.

City Hall will open its doors to the public on June 1, although there will be a checkpoint, and limited numbers of people will be allowed inside of each office at once.

Face coverings will still be mandatory for all individuals using public or private transportation.

Dalton Zbierski is an editor who can be reached at dzbierski@turley.com.

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Colts fall to Brownies



PHOTOS BY DAVID HENRY WWW.SWEETDOGPHOTOS.COM

Nicholas Farrell fields a grounder at third base.

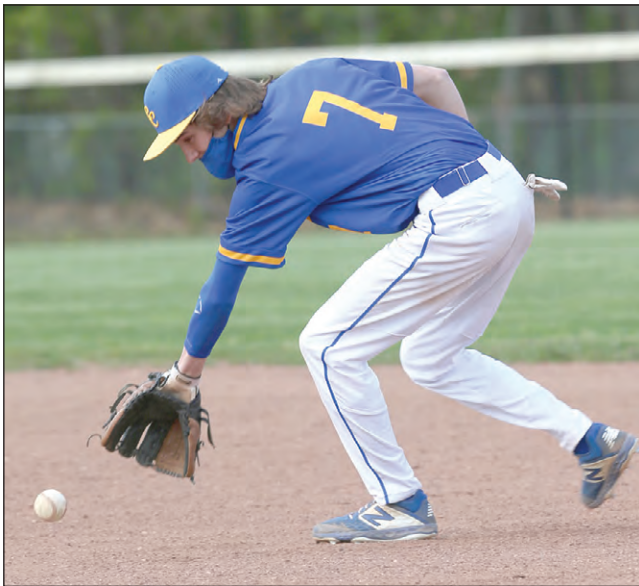


Shortstop Chase Young fires to first for an out.



Pitcher Cal Bullins fires to the plate.

AGAWAM – Last Thursday afternoon, the Chicopee Comprehensive High School baseball team had a tough time handling the Agawam offense. The Brownies overwhelmed the Colts with a 15-5 decision at Agawam High School.



Richard Starsiak makes a backhand play.

Pacers complete comeback, beat Colts



Jordayn Padilla makes a basket catch on an out at first.

CHICOPEE – Chicopee softball trailed by four runs heading into the bottom of the sixth inning. The Pacers came all the way back down 11-7 with two runs each in the sixth and seventh, then scored again in the eighth for a 12-11 extra-inning win over rival Chicopee Comprehensive. Emma Farrell had a big day for come with two hits and four RBI. A pair of Pacers had three hits each.



Comp's Haley Denette runs down the ball.



Anessa Shimkus throws to first.

PHOTOS BY DAVID HENRY WWW.SWEETDOGPHOTOS.COM



Pitcher Sophia Meade pitches for the Pacers.

Santaniello makes impact in Mutiny's return

By Tim Peterson
Sports Correspondent



PHOTOS BY DAVID HENRY WWW.SWEETDOGPHOTOS.COM

Hope Santaniello, of Agawam, scored in the season opener for the Mutiny.

LUDLOW—Most college students will usually chill out for the rest of the day after taking a final exam.

That's not exactly what Laura Gouvin, who lives in Monson, did after taking a Spanish final at Boston College last Saturday afternoon.

After finishing the last exam of her freshman year, Gouvin drove about 80 miles west on the Mass. Pike. She arrived at historic Lusitano Stadium in Ludlow about ten minutes prior to the start of the New England Mutiny's season opening match versus the Boston Scorpions S.C., who are first-year member of the United Women's Soccer League.

The Scorpions stunned the Mutiny by scoring a pair of goals during the first ten minutes and they held onto the lead for the



Ludlow's Ela Kopec kicks the ball away.

next 65 minutes.

Gouvin, who's a midfielder, assisted on the Mutiny's first goal of the season which was scored by Agawam native Hope Santaniello, who's a forward, during the 76th minute.

A minute later, Melina Couzis, who was a senior defender on the UConn women's soccer



Laura Govin, of Monson, tries to advance the ball up the field.

team this past spring, netted the equalizer for the Mutiny and the match ended in a 2-2 draw.

"Even though I only played a couple of games for the Mutiny in 2019, I really love being a member of this soccer club," said Gouvin. "This stadium is very close to my hometown and I'm really looking forward to

playing a full season with the Mutiny this year."

Gouvin and several of her teammates have never lost a regular season match while wearing a Mutiny uniform. The last time they suffered a regular season loss was during 2018 season. The Mutiny played their home matches at several different fields that season before moving into Lusitano Stadium at the start of the 2019 campaign.

"This stadium is the best home field in our entire league," said second-year Mutiny head coach Jeb Booth. "No other team has the same type of soccer culture that we do here. It's a little disappointing that the concession building wasn't open yet because we can't socialize with the players and their families following the match. It's all about the relationship with me."

See **MUTINY** page 10

Buffone captures first win of season

WINCHESTER, N.H. – Ricky Whipple romped to victory in the 57-lap John Zellman Memorial Pure Stock feature Saturday, May 8, at Monadnock Speedway, however in post-race inspection, Davis was awarded the win.

Cam Curtis flexed his muscles to top the Late Model Sportsman main, with Chris Buffone taking no prisoners en route to the Street Stock victory.

Mini Stock ace Gordon Farnum earned his first victory lap of the season Saturday, while Six Shooter powerhouse Dustin Thibodeau's first career outing on the high banks netted him the win, and Jake Bosse was victorious for the second week in a row in the Young Guns.

Pure Stock powerhouses Chris Davis and Kodi Sabins led the 21-car field to begin the 57-lapper, which would sail by in breakneck fashion, as all 57-circuits around the high banks were run without cautions. Davis was the man on the point for the first 23 go-rounds.

But while Davis was fast, Ricky Whipple was on a rail. Dropping Davis to second on lap 24, he then sped away and hid. Sabins, a distant second with the white flag in the air, suddenly coasted to a stop in the infield, handing the runner-up spot back to Davis, with former Modsman Joey Jarvis completing his charge from row five to finish third. (in post-race inspection the official top three were Chris Davies, Joey Jarvis and JD Stockwell).

Robert Hagar led early and often in the LMS 25-lapper but, on this night, teen star Cam Curtis had the hot hand. Curtis dropped Hagar to second on lap 18 and pulled away.

Hagar finished strong, though, sailing to the runner-up finish ahead of the



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Chris Buffone, of Belchertown, picked up a win in the 25-lap Street Stock event May 8 at Monadnock Speedway.

Bay State Curtis twins, Chase and Jaret. Cole Littlewood was fifth.

Chris Buffone, who'd struggled on opening night, put all his ills behind him Saturday. Starting up front, he led all the way in the 25-lap Street Stock feature to finish well ahead of strong and steady runner-up Nathan Wenzel.

Alstead, N.H. hot shoe Rupert Murdoch came home third, just ahead of Hillary Renaud and Tim Wenzel. Opening night winner Tommy O'Sullivan – Buffone's uncle – took the night off.

In the Mini Stocks, it was four-holer star Gordon Farnum leading all the way. Opening night winner Ray King kept Farnum in sight but had no answer for the Fitzwilliam hot shoe. Kevin Cormier came home third, just ahead of Louie Ma-

her and division rookie Mike Douglas.

Travis Hollis led the first 21 laps of the Six Shooter main, but Claremont kingpin Dustin Thibodeau, in his first-ever Monadnock run, used the high groove to finally take control and top the division's first feature race of the season. It was Thibodeau's second victory of the weekend.

Hollis was strong in second, with Brandon Mailhot steady for third. Hollis and Mailhot were the earlier qualifying race winners.

Jake Bosse made it two in a row in the novice Young Guns. Fast Eddie Petruskevicius earned the runner-up hardware, with Jeff Moffat third. Leilei Daniels won Saturday's Young Gun heat race.

Monadnock Speedway will return to action next Saturday, May 15, with a full

card of NHSTRA racing, featuring the mighty Modifieds' third outing of the season.. For more information, please visit www.monadnockspeedway.com.

Monadnock Speedway May 8 results:

Street Stocks: Christopher Buffone, Nathan Wenzel, 88-Hillary Renaud, Timothy Wenzel, Paul Smith, Nathaniel Nunez, Keith Johnson, Isabella Michella

Late Model Sportsman: Camdyn Curtis, Robert Hagar, Chase Curtis, Jaret Curtis, Justin Littlewood, Austin Brehio, Tyler Lescord, Cole Littlewood, William Kuhn, Kevin Vaudrien, Nancy Muni Ruot, Daniel Comeau, Rocky Smith, Ryan Currier, Scott Beck

Mini Stocks: Gordon Farnum, Raymond King, Kevin Cormier, Louie Maher, Michael Douglas, Ethan Marsh, Jeff Asselin, Kevin McKnight, William Chaffee, Trevor Carey, Patrick Houle, Jake Puchalski, Matthew Lambert, Adam Sprague, Tim LeBlanc, Josh Wright, Kevin Clayton

Young Guns: Jake Bosse, Edward Petruskevicius, Jeffrey Moffat Jr, Leilei Daniels, Aaliyah Tacy

Six Shooters: Dustin Thibodeau, Travis Hollins, Brandon Mailhot, Chris Hadley, Micheal Yeaton, Bucky Thibodeau, Maxwell Chaput, Jeremy Blood, Chooch Snide], Paul Colburn, John Thibodeau

Pure Stocks: Chris Davis, Joseph Jarvis, JD Stockwell, Jason LeRay, David Stone Jr, Kodi Sabins, Jake Bosse, Ken LaFont, Cory Lofland, Damien Houle, James Zellman Sr, Brittany Patnode, Brianna Patnode, Ryan Lawliss, James Zellman, Kyle Robinson Newell, Nicholas Houle, Chris Higbee, Carter Chamberlin, William Graham

Follow Turley Sports on Instagram

Turley Publications sports department has recently joined Instagram. You can find our account by searching "turleysports." We will regularly feature samples of photos that you will see in our publications on a weekly basis. Please follow and share with your friends and loved ones. We will be featuring photos from all 11 of our sports sections in the coming weeks, but as always, you can see all the photos that appear by subscribing to your local paper or picking up a copy in your community.

MUTINY from page 9

The Mutiny finished the 2019 regular season with an 8-0-2 mark before falling to the Lancaster Inferno in the U.W.S. Eastern Conference Finals. The Mutiny players waited more than 670 days before playing another match because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Booth wasn't very concerned after watching his team fall behind by two goals early in the match.

"I always believe that we will win every match," said Booth, who also coaches the Fitchburg State University women's soccer team. "I believe in them as a team and as players, so I don't get nervous about things very often."

The Scorpions are coached by Evan Burokas, who was a member of the Western Mass. Pioneers from 2012-2019. He also played for the Western Mass Professional team in 2015.

"None of my players had ever played a soccer match at this stadium before tonight," Burokas said. "I told them what this stadium represents to the community and what it means to play here. It was very special for me to have my team here for the first time. We did take an early 2-0 lead, but we knew it was going to be a tough game. They just kept pressing us."

There are a couple of other connections between the Scorpions and the Mutiny.

Booth has coached several of the Scorpions ENCL regional teams for more than ten years.

Lauren Berman, who's currently a Mutiny midfielder, played for the Scorpions youth teams from U-8 to U-18. Just like Gouvin, Berman played college soccer at Boston College. She also played for a professional soccer club in Hungary for two seasons and is currently the soccer operations coordinator for the women's soccer team at Harvard University.

The Scorpions took a 1-0 lead when forward Kristi Vierra lofted a shot from the left side of the box into the upper right

corner over the head of Mutiny goalkeeper Caitlin Murphy.

Then forward Meg Hughes scored a breakaway goal giving the Scorpions a 2-0 advantage seven minutes into the season opener.

Another Monson resident listed on this year's Mutiny roster is midfielder Lily Fabian, who's a first-year member of the team. Fabian, who plays college soccer at UMass-Lowell, took the Mutiny's first shot on goal that was saved by Scorpion's goalie Kayla Thompson, who was replaced at the start of the second half by Skylar Kuzmich.

The Mutiny also changed goalies during the second half.

Ela Kopec, who was starting goalie for the Ludlow girls' varsity soccer team last fall, replaced Murphy.

During the 76th minute, Santaniello, who'll be a member of the U.R.I. women's soccer team in the fall, received a pass from Gouvin and put a shot into the net.

"I saw that Laura had the ball, but I didn't really know if she was going to make a pass or take a shot," Santaniello said. "She made the pass to me and I just poked it into the net with my toe. It felt great after scoring that goal."

After stealing a pass from a defender, Couzis scored the tying goal a minute later.

Kopec, who'll be a freshman member of the Villanova women's soccer team in the fall, made an outstanding diving save, which kept the score tied.

"Caitlyn played well, and our plan was to change goalies in the second half," Booth said. "Ela also played very well. She has good hands and has the potential to be an outstanding goalkeeper."

The other local players listed on the Mutiny gameday roster were Trystin Burger (Granby), Jocelyn Trajkovski (Ludlow), and Lydia Kinsman (Southwick).

The Mutiny will be looking to celebrate their first victory of the season when they host the Connecticut Rush at 7p.m. on Saturday night.

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Elms College graduates 471 Students

CHICOPEE – College of Our Lady of the Elms issued diplomas to the 471 students comprising the Class of 2021 at the college’s 90th Commencement exercises on Sat., May 15, on the college’s campus in Chicopee.

The Class of 2021 includes 339 undergraduates. The college awarded 6 associate of arts degrees, 170 bachelor of arts degrees, 169 bachelor of science degrees, 111 master’s degrees, and 21 doctor of nursing practice degrees.

In his address to the graduates, President Harry E. Dumay, Ph.D., MBA, spoke of a lesson that he learned from his late father – to be a more humane person.

“May you keep in your heart the desire to become day-by-day a more humane person. May you view every person as someone who matters and may you keep caring for the dear neighbor, especially the less privileged.”

Dumay added, “May you keep the faith in your own ability and that of those around you. Congratulations, class of 2021. We have faith in you.”

Commencement address

The Commencement speaker, Haitian-American novelist and short story writer Edwidge Danticat, MFA, delivered an inspirational address for the Class of 2021.

Danticat likened the Class of 2021 and the entire Elms community to a Haitian concept called a combite, which is a gathering of a community with a shared goal that benefits an entire community or an individual in need. “Never stop wondering at the mountains, at the rivers, at the ocean and the sea but also at yourselves. And wherever you go, bring all of yourself. Bring your heart, bring your soul, bring both your passion and compassion, along with your courage. You are all individuals but together you are the combite that is Elms.”

Danticat will be granted an honorary



Elms College celebrated its 90th Commencement exercises on May 15, 2021.

degree at a later date when she can receive it in-person.

Honorary degree recipients

Honorary degrees were also awarded to Cynthia Lyons, philanthropist and outgoing chair of the Elms College Board of Trustees, and Nicholas Cocchi, MBA ’13, Hampden County Sheriff, in recognition of their outstanding contributions to the community and the region.

Distinguished student

The 2021 valedictorian is communication sciences and disorders major Shaughnessy Docekal ’21 of South Grafton, MA, and she delivered the valedictory address during the ceremony.

About Elms College

Elms College is a co-educational

ELMS COMMENCEMENT PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY ELMS COLLEGE

Catholic college offering a liberal arts curriculum that prepares students holistically for a purposeful life in a diverse and interconnected world. Founded in 1928 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, Elms College has a tradition of educating reflective, principled and creative learners, who are rooted in faith, educated in mind, compassionate in heart, responsive to civic and social obligations, and capable of adjusting to change without compromising principle.

Class of 2021 Valedictorian Shaughnessy Docekal ’21 delivers her valedictory remarks at Elms College’s 90th Commencement exercises on May 15, 2021.



Elms College President Harry E. Dumay, Ph.D., MBA, delivers his Commencement speech at the college’s 90th Commencement exercises on May 15, 2021.



Local students graduate from Assumption University

WORCESTER – On May 9, nearly 400 graduates received a bachelor’s degree during Assumption University’s 104th Commencement exercises on Sunday, May 9, at the DCU Center in downtown Worcester. Pulitzer Prize-winning and nationally syndicated Washington Post columnist George F. Will, Ph.D., delivered what he called the “last Assumption lecture for which you will be a captive audience” to the Class of 2021, in which he urged the graduates to live in the present while also imagining the past. The Class of 2021 is the first to graduate from Assumption University, which transitioned from Assumption College last year. Local students included:

- Zachary Dubreuil, of Chicopee
- Derek Girouard, of Chicopee

In his commencement address, Will shared an example of just how one’s liberal education can help one better understand the world. He prompted graduates

to consider the political unrest in America and the “mudslinging” against “past Americans who played large roles in the creation and preservation of our nation,” whose statues are being toppled and names scrubbed from public buildings and places for what mudslingers deem moral and political failures.

“No one says our nation was, or those who passed it on to us, were without sin,” he shared. “Rather, I am here to warn against the sin of pride. This is the sin of those who today so much enjoy rendering harsh judgments against those who acted in earlier days; in harshly judging those who produced our nation, today’s unforgiving critics are guilty of their own sin. It is the sin of presentism.”

Will explained that presentism is “the fallacy of judging by our standards the behavior of those who acted in circumstances very different than ours,”

and that the only cure is a deep historical knowledge. “Only such knowledge can give us the ability to imagine what it was like to have been America’s leaders trying to act morally, as we all must try, in situations not of their choosing or of their making,” he said. “What I’m asking for, what I’m pleading for, is imagination. Usually when we speak of imagination, it is prospective imagination, imagination of the future, but what we urgently need now is retrospective imagination. The ability to imagine the past,” said Will.

Will called presentism a “pandemic of vindictiveness,” and a pandemic, though not of a virus, but something for which there is no vaccine. “Historically-grounded empathy inoculates us against the sin of pride that is at the cold heart of presentism,” said Will.

Will said that he hoped that the graduates’ time at Assumption had provided

them with two talents that would make them immune to such moral vanity—a talent for gratitude and a talent for praising. “Having gratitude for those men and women in the American past, who, like all of us, were flawed but who nevertheless handed on to us a nation that had fewer flaws than when they inherited it,” he said. “Praising is an act of humility, an act of homage to those who have been in the arena and who have

During the ceremony, Will and Vincent Strully, Jr., founder and CEO of the New England Center for Children, received honorary degrees. Will was honored for his “steadfast pursuit of knowledge and distinguished commentary [that] has enriched the American media landscape,” while Strully was recognized for his “four decades of selfless service” in which he has dedicated himself to “empowering those in the autism community.”

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Chicopee Register

OBITUARY POLICY

Turley Publications offers two types of obituaries.

One is a free, brief **Death Notice** listing the name of deceased, date of death and funeral date and place.

The other is a **Paid Obituary**, costing \$120, which allows families to publish extended death notice information of their own choice and may include a photograph. **Death Notices & Paid Obituaries** should be submitted through a funeral home to: obits@turley.com.

Exceptions will be made only when the family provides a death certificate and must be pre-paid.

STCC student gets degree at age 60

SPRINGFIELD – Heide Blackak had a dream of getting a degree when she decided to enroll at Springfield Technical Community College as a full-time student in her late 50s.

Two years later, at the age of 60, she's not only getting a degree – she is receiving recognition as one of the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education's "29 Who Shine." The award recognizes 29 outstanding student graduates from the Commonwealth's public higher education system.

"I was really overwhelmed to be in that group of young people," said Agawam resident Blackak, who is one of the oldest recipients in the award's 10-year history.

Each year, the state honors outstanding students who show promise as future leaders and demonstrate a strong record of academic achievement. The 29 will be honored in an online ceremony on Thursday, May 13, at 2 p.m.

Blackak will earn her degree in liberal arts/general studies with a 4.0 grade point average.

Blackak first took college classes decades ago not long after graduating from high school in Pennsylvania. She received a scholarship to study languages. However, she never finished. She got married and raised two children who are now in their 30s.

"In the back of my mind I always thought I would love to finish school," Blackak said.

When she decided it was time to go back, she chose STCC because it was affordable and close to home. Washington Monthly rated STCC as Best 2-Year College for Adult Learners. The faculty and staff welcomed her and made the process of enrolling easy. "No one once made me feel uncomfortable by being older. I made many new friends, who I keep in touch with on social media," she said.

She said her grown sons supported her decision to enroll at STCC, ranked fourth best community college in the United States by Academic Influence. When she got an A in class, she would text a photo of the grade to them.

"They were like, 'Mom, you're so smart!'" Blackak said, chuckling. She often punctuates her responses with an infectious laugh.

"My grandchildren are more excited than anyone. They would say, 'Oh my gosh, you have a 4.0,' or, 'You won this award!'" It's exciting to them, and they would look up and say, 'If she can do it, then I can do it.'"

Her partner, Paul, provided support and help with homework on Saturday night.

Blackak pursued her degree while working two full-time jobs. She also was caring for her mother, who was receiving cancer treatment. She would read textbooks during lunch breaks and also worked on assignments late at night. On

top of her studies and work, she serves as an STCC Student Ambassador and volunteers her time for a number of organizations, including hospice care and the American Red Cross.

She listed her math classes as the highlight of her STCC experience, which might come as a surprise to her friends who knew about her math phobia.

"When I went to school, I failed math and had to go to summer school. I didn't understand the concept of math. I am not a logical thinker, I asked too many questions," she said.

But the math instructors at STCC supported her and went the extra mile to ensure she would succeed. She said Professor Zahi Haddad "was a phenomenal teacher."

"If we asked the same question 20 different ways, he took the time to go over it again," she said.

She took advantage of the resources at STCC, including the supplemental instruction program which consists of student peers enrolled at the college who help in and out of the classroom. She used the free tutoring program at STCC and hired a private tutor.



Heide Blackak

"I went early, stayed late, did extra credit and never missed a class. I got an A. My very first A in math since I was in sixth grade," she said.

She thanked algebra instructor, James McDonald, and math professor, Ann-Marie Simao, both of whom helped her accomplish her dream.

"I learned to really love math," Blackak said. "I thought I was 'dumb' in math my whole life.

It really prevented me from doing more. You can't do surgery, build a spaceship or build a bridge if you can't do math. So I never thought I could do this. After going to STCC, I realized I was really smart in math and I could do anything."

STCC Academic Counselor Elisabeth Cantor, who taught Blackak in an Introduction to Sociology course, nominated her for the 29 Who Shine award.

Cantor said she was thrilled to learn that Blackak was chosen for the 29 Who Shine award.

"She's a lovely lady, and it couldn't have happened to a nicer person," Cantor said. "And she does shine."

Interested in applying to STCC? Visit stcc.edu/apply or call Admissions at (413) 755-3333.

Sen. Lesser receives Caring Bear Award

BOSTON – On May 14, Sen. Eric Lesser was celebrated as a 2021 Caring Bear honoree at a virtual ceremony hosted by the Providers' Council for The Caring Force's Tenth Annual State House Rally. Sen. Lesser was presented the award by Michael Weekes, Providers' Council President & CEO, and Lydia Todd, Chair of

the Caring Force Committee, in recognition of his exceptional commitment to the human service sector composed of thousands of essential workers.

This session, Sen. Lesser filed, 'An Act relative to creating a loan repayment program for human service workers (S.120),' to ensure that workers are not

saddled with massive student loan debt while balancing the demands of their life saving work.

The Caring Bear award, also presented this year to Representative Tram T. Nguyen, is made on behalf of the 28,000 members of The Caring Force and one of the Providers' Council's highest awards

presented annually to a legislator.

"I feel humbled to receive this 2021 Caring Bear award. I want to thank my friend Michael Weekes, Lydia Todd, and the over 28,000 members of the Caring Force that have stepped up to provide care during an incredibly challenging time in our Commonwealth," said Lesser.

KNAPP from page 6

half a billion dollars) for two pizzas. Sorry, guys. Bitcoin's probably not going away, and cryptocurrency in general certainly isn't.

Yes, Bitcoin mining (the computer activity involved in processing transactions) is energy-intensive. No, not all Bitcoin is mined using fossil fuels. In fact, many serious mining outfits specifically look for locations with cheap, plentiful hydroelectric power.

And no, not all cryptocurrency mining is nearly as ener-

gy-intensive as Bitcoin mining. So, what's Musk up to? Is he just having fun upsetting apple carts? Or is there business method behind his madness? Financier (and former Trump White House Communications Director) Anthony Scaramucci thinks he knows. Scaramucci suggests (with a small hypothetical wager of 1/200th of a Bitcoin) that Musk's next big cryptocurrency play will be to send Tesla's energy subsidiary into "super clean" Bitcoin mining. That would be a smart move from both directions. It would reduce the financial and environmental costs

of mining, while giving solar and wind power a boost in their fight to displace fossil fuels generally. The technology underlying cryptocurrency is sound. It will survive, and it will become dominant. The only question is whether it will completely displace, or be at least partially co-opted by, government monetary schemes.

Hopefully the former. Getting government out of the money business would be a gigantic leap for human freedom and prosperity (and, maybe even a step toward getting government out of business entirely).

PETITION from page 6

underlies state education policy and causes untold harm to the children of Massachusetts urban centers. That assumption is that city schools would be better off with less democracy, with state appointees determining more of what happens in the classroom. CPS maintains the opposite: Children learn better when their schools respond to their communities. Massachusetts Jobs with Justice is a coalition of over 160 community, faith, and labor groups in Massachusetts organizing working people and allies to fight for the rights of all workers: locally, nationally, and internationally.

EARLY DEADLINES

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Friday, May 28

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Friday, May 28

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PUBLIC NOTICES

Commonwealth of
Massachusetts
The Trial Court
Hampden Probate and
Family Court
50 State Street
Springfield, MA 01103
(413)748-7758
Docket No. HD21P0889EA
Estate of:
Marion Theresa Plasse
Also known as:
Marion T Plasse
Date of Death: 12/09/2020
CITATION ON
PETITION FOR
FORMAL
ADJUDICATION

To all interested persons:
A Petition for **Formal Probate of Will with Appointment of Personal Representative** has been filed by **Debra S Kozikowski** of Chicopee, MA requesting that the Court enter a formal Decree and Order and for such other relief as requested in the Petition.

The Petitioner requests that: **Debra S Kozikowski** of Chicopee, MA be appointed as Personal Representative(s) of said estate to serve **Without Surety** on the bond in an **unsupervised administration**.

IMPORTANT NOTICE
You have the right to obtain a copy of the Petition from the Petitioner or at the Court. You have a right to object to this proceeding. To do so, you or your attorney must file a written appearance and objection at this Court before: **10:00 a.m. on the return day of 06/11/2021**.

This is NOT a hearing date, but a deadline by which you must file a written appearance and objection if you object to this proceeding. If you fail to file a timely written appearance and objection followed by an Affidavit of Objections within thirty (30) days of the return date, action may be taken without further notice to you.

UNSUPERVISED ADMINISTRATION UNDER THE MASSACHUSETTS UNIFORM PROBATE CODE (MUPC)

A Personal Representative appointed under the MUPC in an unsupervised administration is not required to file an inventory or annual accounts with the Court. Persons interested in the estate are entitled to notice regarding the administration directly from the Personal Representative and may petition the Court in any matter relating to the estate, including the distribution of assets and expenses of administration.

WITNESS, Hon. **Barbara M Hyland**, First Justice of this Court.
Date: May 13, 2021
Rosemary A Saccomani
Register of Probate
05/21/2021

Commonwealth of
Massachusetts
The Trial Court
Hampden Probate and
Family Court
50 State Street
Springfield, MA 01103
(413)748-7758
Docket No. HD21C0079CA
In the matter of:
Esther Melody Blake
CITATION ON PETITION
TO CHANGE NAME
A Petition to Change Name of Minor has been filed by **Esther Melody Blake** of Chicopee, MA requesting that the court enter a Decree changing their name to:
Melody Esther Blake
IMPORTANT NOTICE

Any person may appear for purposes of objecting to the petition by filing an appearance at: **Hampden Probate and Family Court before 10:00 a.m. on the return day of 06/01/2021**.

This is NOT a hearing date, but a deadline by which you must file a written appearance if you object to this proceeding.

WITNESS, Hon. **Barbara M Hyland**, First Justice of this Court.
Date: May 04, 2021
Rosemary A Saccomani
Register of Probate
05/21/2021

Commonwealth of
Massachusetts
The Trial Court
Probate and Family Court
Hampden Division
50 State Street
Springfield, MA 01103
(413)748-8600
Docket No. HD21P0874EA
Estate of:
Theodore Joseph Cebula, Jr.
Also Known As:
Theodore Cebula, Jr.
Date of Death:
March 5, 2021
INFORMAL PROBATE PUBLICATION NOTICE

To all persons interested in the above captioned estate, by Petition of Petitioner **Joseph J. Cebula** of West Springfield, MA

Joseph J. Cebula of West Springfield, MA has been informally appointed as the Personal Representative of the estate to serve **without** surety on the bond.

The estate is being administered under informal procedure by the Personal Representative under the Massachusetts Uniform Probate Code without supervision by the Court. Inventory and accounts are not required to be filed with the Court, but interested parties are entitled to notice regarding the administration from the Personal Representative and can petition the Court in any matter relating to the estate, including distribution of assets and expenses of administration. Interested parties are entitled to petition the Court to institute formal proceedings and to obtain orders terminating or restricting the powers of Personal Representatives appointed under informal procedure. A copy of the Petition and Will, if any, can be obtained from the Petitioner.
05/21/2021

SALE OF MOTOR VEHICLES Under G.L. c.255 Sec. 39A
Notice is hereby given by Interstate Towing, Inc. pursuant to the provisions of G.L. c. 255, section 39A, that on **May 21, 2021** at Interstate

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Westfield, MA 01085

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VIN: JNKDA31A04T209457
Christian Edwards
341 Hampden St
Chicopee, MA 01020

2006 Infiniti M35
VIN: JNKAY01F76M255177
Tejanae Wilson
43 Day St 1R
West Springfield, MA 01089

2007 Toyota Sequoia
Vin: 5TDZT34AX7S291178
Terry Alan Black Jr
50 Kelsey Way
Palmetto, GA 30268

2008 Jeep Wrangler
VIN: 1J4FA24128L646909
Terrance Yates
8 St Paul St
Westfield, MA 01085

2009 Hyundai Sonata
VIN: 5NPET46C79H416147
Destiny Michelle Mone
Pressley
598 Dwight St Apt 508
Holyoke, MA 01040

2009 Volkswagen Jetta
VIN: 3VWRZ71K69M017219
Cody Benane
7311 Town Brook
Middletown, CT 06457

2013 Subaru Crpsstrek
VIN: JF2GPAKCXD2857543
David Moran
133 Richard St
Hartford, CT 06119

2014 Dodge Charger
VIN: 2C3CDXBG2EH215326
Pv Holding
23-45 87Th St
East Elmherst, NY 11369
05/07, 05/14, 05/21/2021

Commonwealth of
Massachusetts
The Trial Court
Hampden Probate and
Family Court
50 State Street
Springfield, MA 01103
(413)748-7758
Docket No. HD21C0094CA
In the matter of:
Darren Jacob Low
CITATION ON PETITION
TO CHANGE NAME
A Petition to Change Name of Minor has been filed by **Darren Jacob Low** of Chicopee, MA requesting that the court enter a Decree changing their name to:
Darren Jacob Thomas Moya
IMPORTANT NOTICE

Any person may appear for purposes of objecting to the petition by filing an appearance at: **Hampden Probate and Family Court before 10:00 a.m. on the return day of 06/08/2021**.

This is NOT a hearing date, but a deadline by which you must file a written appearance if you object to this proceeding.

WITNESS, Hon. **Barbara M Hyland**, First Justice of this Court.
Date: May 11, 2021
Rosemary A Saccomani
Register of Probate
05/21/2021

Commonwealth of
Massachusetts
The Trial Court
Hampden Probate and
Family Court
50 State Street
Springfield, MA 01103
(413)748-7758
Docket No. HD21C0093CA
In the matter of:
Elizabeth Helen Lydon
CITATION ON PETITION
TO CHANGE NAME
A Petition to Change Name of Minor has been filed by **Elizabeth Helen Lydon** of Chicopee, MA requesting that the court enter a Decree changing their name to:
Emmalee Helen Lydon
IMPORTANT NOTICE

Any person may appear for purposes of objecting to the petition by filing an appearance at: **Hampden Probate and Family Court before 10:00 a.m. on the return day of 06/08/2021**.

This is NOT a hearing date, but a deadline by which you must file a written appearance if you object to this proceeding.

WITNESS, Hon. **Barbara M Hyland**, First Justice of this Court.
Date: May 11, 2021
Rosemary A Saccomani
Register of Probate
05/21/2021

Commonwealth of
Massachusetts
The Trial Court
Probate and Family Court
Hampden Division
50 State Street
Springfield, MA 01103
(413)748-8600
Docket No. HD21P0871EA
Estate of:
Kathryn Mary Croteau
Also Known As:
Kathryn M. Croteau
Date of Death:
04/05/2021
INFORMAL PROBATE PUBLICATION NOTICE
To all persons interested in the above captioned estate, by Petition of Petitioner **Daniel J Moore** of South Hadley, MA.

Daniel J Moore of South Hadley, MA has been informally appointed as the Personal Representative of the estate to serve **without** surety on the bond.

The estate is being administered under informal procedure by the Personal Representative under the Massachusetts Uniform Probate Code without super-

vision by the Court. Inventory and accounts are not required to be filed with the Court, but interested parties are entitled to notice regarding the administration from the Personal Representative and can petition the Court in any matter relating to the estate, including distribution of assets and expenses of administration. Interested parties are entitled to petition the Court to institute formal proceedings and to obtain orders terminating or restricting the powers of Personal Representatives appointed under informal procedure. A copy of the Petition and Will, if any, can be obtained from the Petitioner.
05/21/2021

Commonwealth of
Massachusetts
The Trial Court
Hampden Probate and
Family Court
50 State Street
Springfield, MA 01103
(413)748-7758
Docket No. HD20P1717EA
Estate of: **John S Palys**
Date of Death: 12/13/2019
CITATION ON
PETITION FOR
FORMAL APPOINTMENT
OF SUCCESSOR
PERSONAL
REPRESENTATIVE

To all interested persons:
A Petition has been filed by: **John J Ferriter** of Holyoke, MA requesting that the Court enter a formal Decree and Order that **John J Ferriter** of Holyoke, MA be appointed as Successor Personal Representative(s) of said estate to serve **With Corporate Surety** on the bond and for such other relief as requested in the Petition.

You have the right to obtain a copy of the Petition from the Petitioner or at the Court. You have a right to object to this proceeding. To do so, you or your attorney must file a written appearance and objection at this Court before **10:00 a.m. on 06/11/2021**.

This is NOT a hearing date, but a deadline by which you must file a written appearance and objection if you object to this proceeding. If you fail to file a timely written appearance and objection followed by an Affidavit of Objections within thirty (30) days of the return date, action may be taken without further notice to you.

The estate is being administered under formal procedure by the Personal Representative under the Massachusetts Uniform Probate Code without supervision by the Court. Inventory and accounts are not required to be filed with the Court, but recipients are entitled to notice regarding the administration from the Personal

Representative and can petition the Court in any matter relating to the estate, including distribution of assets and expenses of administration.

WITNESS, Hon. **Barbara M Hyland**, First Justice of this Court.
Date: May 14, 2021
Rosemary A Saccomani
Register of Probate
05/21/2021

Commonwealth of
Massachusetts
County of Hampden
The Superior Court
CIVIL DOCKET
#2179CV00163
RE: **Easthampton Savings Bank vs Angela M Vatter**
ORDER OF NOTICE BY PUBLICATION
TO: **Angela M Vatter**, an individual with an address of 303 Fairview Avenue, Chicopee, Massachusetts; in the County of Hampden; all in said Commonwealth;
AND TO ALL PERSONS ENTITLED TO THE BENEFIT OF THE SERVICE MEMBERS' CIVIL RELIEF ACT OF 1940 AS AMENDED 2003 as amended:

Easthampton Savings Bank, a banking institution with its principal office located at 36 Main Street, Easthampton, Massachusetts

claiming to be the holder of mortgage covering known as 303 Fairview Avenue, Chicopee, Hampden County, Massachusetts
given by the Defendant, **Angela M Vatter** to Easthampton Savings Bank dated March 1, 2012

recorded in Hampden County Registry of Deeds Book 19151, Page 32, has filed with said court a Complaint for authority to foreclose said mortgage in the manner following: by entry on and possession of the premises therein described and by exercise of the power of sale contained in said mortgage.

If you are entitled to the benefits of the Service Members' Civil Relief Act of 1940 as amended, and you object to such foreclosure you or your attorney should file a written appearance and answer in said court at Springfield in said County on or before 06/18/21 or you may be forever barred from claiming that such foreclosure is invalid under said Act.

Witness, **Judith Fabricant**, Esquire, Chief Justice of the Superior Court, at Springfield, Massachusetts, this 7th day of May, 2021.
05/21/2021

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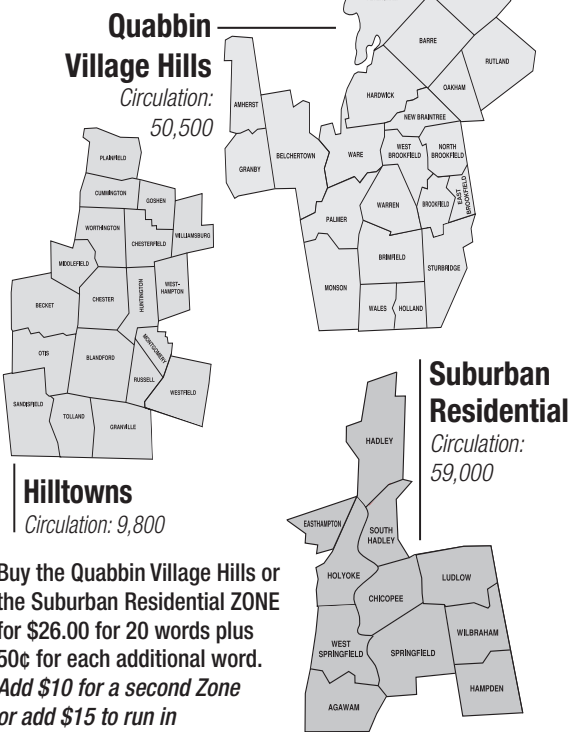
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Lesser encourages vaccinations

By Dalton Zbierski
Editor

BOSTON – On May 17, Gov. Charlie Baker announced that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts would lift nearly all COVID-19 restrictions on businesses and gatherings on May 29, as the state works towards vaccinating 4.1 million residents by the end of the first week of June.

On May 29, the state will also rescind its mask mandate, as individuals, who are fully vaccinated, can return to normal activities in or outdoors without wearing a mask or physically distancing.

Therefore, the importance of getting vaccinated is at an all-time high. State Sen. Eric Lesser of the First Hampden & Hampshire District recently shared his thoughts on the state’s vaccination rollout.

“That’s going to be the way that we get back to a semblance of normalcy; it’s going to be through the vaccination ef-

forts,” said Lesser. “There’s nothing else happening really that’s more urgent than making sure the vaccine gets out to the community.”

In January, Lesser was highly critical of the lack of vaccine doses available in Hampden County. He recalled his initial concerns pertaining to the state’s uneven vaccine rollout plan.

“In the early stages, I was not satisfied with the state’s engagement with communities or, frankly, the quality of the state’s rollout in the initial phases,” said Lesser. “The website was confusing; the website crashed despite repeated assurances by the highest levels of state government, including the Governor himself, that it was going to work. It ended up not working.”

Lesser said that there were a number of conflicting guidelines that confused countless residents in early 2021. He was also discouraged that new categories of people became eligible for doses before the majority of populations, who were al-

ready eligible, were vaccinated.

“That created a lot of anxiety for people,” said Lesser.

More than four months later, Lesser has adopted a different opinion. He’s proud of how the state responded to early difficulties that resonated throughout western Massachusetts.

“At this point, the supply issues do seem to be resolved. You’ve got CVS, Walmart and Walgreens offering them. You’ve got local vaccine sites offering them,” said Lesser. “Now that the supply chain issues have been getting fixed, they’ve got to move towards a more proactive mindset of getting the vaccine into the communities that, right now, might be hesitant.”

Lesser made it known that he is not a doctor nor a healthcare provider. Nonetheless, he encourages residents to get fully vaccinated, as the doses are available.

Lesser received his second vaccine dose in early May. He acknowledged that hundreds of millions of people around the

globe have also been fully vaccinated.

“It’s a very safe vaccine,” said Lesser. “The [Center for Disease Control and Prevention] has reviewed it, the [Food and Drug Administration] has reviewed it, and if people have questions they should talk to their healthcare provider or talk to their personal doctor and get those questions answered.”

Lesser is optimistic that the state will promote further educational material, enabling hesitant residents to grow more comfortable with the concept of being vaccinated.

He said that in the centuries to come, future generations will study the COVID-19 pandemic and how society responded.

“Through it, I think we’ve learned what’s really important in life. It’s family, it’s community, it’s loyalty to one another, and I think what’s very important through all of this is that we hold onto that spirit and remember that we have to work together,” said Lesser.

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